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The Gannetts of Rochester

Highlights in a Liberal Career

1889-1923

By WILLIAM H. PEASE

In 1890 Rochester was an optimistic city. Prospering and growing over the years, it had become a leading urban center in upstate western New York. It was a friendly city, too; and its citizens prided themselves on their broad, tree-shaded streets, on their new parks, and on that pervasive neighborliness and family spirit which many considered the city's distinctive hallmark. The panic of 1893 and the depression which followed it, the hordes of immigrants which flooded urban America in the 1890's, and that shame of the cities which produced in its wake a voluminous literature of protest and reform had not yet disturbed Rochester's placidity.

It was to this Rochester that, in the spring of 1889, William and Mary Gannett came as pastor and wife of the Unitarian Church. Gannett had thought it a quiet, pleasant little town, a trifle sleepy, perhaps, but delightful. "Rochester," he observed, "is really a lovely—I'd almost written, a lovely *old* city. It suggests an American counterpart to a provincial capital in the old countries,—a sunny, green overgrown village. . . ."¹

Scarcely had the Gannetts arrived, however, when the multiform problems of urban America began to be evident in Rochester. The city had acquired a large and as yet poorly assimilated immigrant population; it had a wholly inadequate charter; it was dominated by

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machine politics, and troubled by child labor, a sub-standard school system, and unfit housing districts.

But Rochester was fortunate, indeed, in having a significantly large body of socially conscious citizens, whose enthusiasm and efforts did credit to the best theory and practice that was the Progressive Era. They did much to meet the challenge which the closing years of the century suddenly thrust upon them. With these people the newly-arrived Gannetts found their place.

* * *

William Channing Gannett was born March 13, 1840, the son of William Ellery Channing's colleague and successor, Ezra Stiles Gannett. Reared in the atmosphere of Renaissance Boston, Gannett grew up with the liberalism of Unitarianism, the mysticism of Emersonian Transcendentalism, and the intellectualism of the New England greats a part of his second nature. When he came of age he went to Harvard, and, after three years of rehabilitation work with the Negroes of Port Royal, South Carolina, during the Civil War, and a year out for the Grand Tour in Europe, he returned to Harvard Divinity School where he was graduated in 1868.

Before coming to Rochester Gannett had served parishes in Milwaukee, East Lexington, Massachusetts, St. Paul, and Hinsdale, Illinois. Most significant, however, of all the events in the twenty-one years between his graduation from Divinity School and his coming to Rochester was his role in the so-called Western Controversy of the Unitarian Church. The controversy centered around the necessity of a fixed creed as the determinant for Unitarian fellowship and around the validity of an Ethical Basis for Unitarianism. Gannett, particularly in the Western Unitarian Conference, led the forces against a creed and for the Ethical Basis, and these liberals eventually won the day.

With the settlement of the Western Controversy in the fall of 1894, Gannett had reached the climax of his career. But, during the years of the controversy, he also became involved in parish and community affairs. After he left St. Paul, in 1884, he lived in Chicago until the fall of 1887. During these years the Western Controversy boiled over; and during these years also Gannett was primarily devoted to Western Conference affairs. Then, in September 1887, he moved to the still rural suburb of Hinsdale where, for the next two years, he revitalized what had been a small and moribund Unitarian society.

While in Hinsdale Gannett was married to a girl whom he had first met some twelve years earlier in Philadelphia. Mary Thorn Lewis's father was a well-to-do Philadelphia railroad executive and his family were not only devout Quakers but also active in liberal and reform causes. Mary Lewis almost instinctively, therefore, was a reformer and a crusader in her own right, and, in Gannett's later years, proved the more active member of their household.

When they moved to Rochester, in June, 1889, it was the Gannetts' last move, for, although Gannett retired in 1908, they stayed on in the city together until his death in 1923. During these last thirty-four years Gannett continued his interest in such organizations as the Free Religious Association, the New York State Parliament of Religion, the Middle States and Canada Conference, and the Unitarian Temperance Society; and he continued to be vitally concerned both with parish affairs and with the life of the community and of the nation. Still, after 1894, he ceased being an active participant, except in a minor capacity, and became primarily the observant commentator.

That he should have relinquished his earlier, more vigorously active life, both in church affairs and in the community, was not strange. Ever since his European trip in 1865-6, Gannett had become progressively more deaf—a barrier which very largely isolated him from his surroundings. And in Mary Gannett he had a marvellously energetic spokesman, who actively and constantly championed the liberal causes which were so close to his heart.

* * *

The philosophy which Gannett brought to his career was in the broadest tradition of social Christianity. His thought was essentially an amalgam of the liberal Unitarianism of Theodore Parker, nourished and matured by his own experience; of the benign social application of Darwinism and the findings of contemporary science; and of the rationalism which sprang from his New England heritage. For him religion ceased to be the private domain of the individual and his God, and became that public domain which insisted that God, man, society, and nature were but facets of a single Unity. What had begun as an individualist oneness between man and God in the Emersonian sense matured into a universal oneness demonstrated by the evolutionary hypothesis and by the increasing social interdependence among men. Individual sin had social effects, and the Love of God for man individually became the Love of God for men collectively. The idea of

Immanence had broadened indistinguishably into a philosophy of the Social Gospel.

Gannett's theology was directed, therefore, not toward man so much as toward men; and his major concern was not with theological hair-splitting but rather with broadening and enriching the lives of his fellow men and of the community. Religious responsibility, in short, was also social responsibility.

This theology dominated all of Gannett's active career. "While we are together," he had written in 1869 to his first parish,

I shall try as I may be able to make our number larger, but with far more interest shall try to make our few closer & more helpful to each other,—a company of friends seeking together the best things for ourselves & for our city outside.*

This spirit, which dominated all of Gannett's ministerial career, was incorporated into the Bond of Union adopted by the Rochester Unitarian Church shortly after the Gannetts moved to the city. "In the Freedom of Truth," read the Bond,

and in the spirit of Human Brotherhood, and to the end that the best meaning of these words may open in our minds, and fill our lives, and make us strong to bear a helpful part in our community, we who here subscribe our names do by this act enter into a Covenant of Love and Service and Right Endeavor with each other. . . .

* * *

Gannett's major achievement had been Unitarianism's adoption of the Ethical Basis, but he was most appreciated during his own lifetime and has been best remembered since his death as a parish minister. The sermons which he preached, the parish projects which he inaugurated or directed, the good causes to which his parish gave its blessing and support—these are the things for which he has been remembered. What he meant to those who knew him and what he contributed to the spiritual growth of his parishioners and admirers can be partially understood by observing the reverence in which he was held, and, in his Rochester parish, by noticing the active role which Mary Gannett played in the affairs of the community.

When the Gannetts came to Rochester they found the Unitarian Church "a *very* 'respectable' looking people, many grey heads among them"; they saw that the Sunday school was "small & sleepy & not in good condition . . ."; and that the Sunday school teachers were "any-

thing but organized & enthusiastic."⁸ Despite such inauspicious beginnings, the church, with the spiritual and practical guidance and example of William and Mary Gannett, increased its activity within its own organization and in the community at large. That flowering was a marked accomplishment.

Much of the church's activity was organized and executed by the Woman's Alliance, founded in 1888, and led from 1889 to 1908 by Mary Gannett. The roster of enterprises sponsored by the alliance included much benevolent work not only outside of Rochester, but outside of the United States as well. During the Gannets' active ministry, for example, the alliance sent bedding and clothing to Tuskegee Normal School, and sheets to the Montana Indian School; gave monetary aid to the burned-out Ithaca, New York, Unitarian Church, to the Icelandic Unitarian Mission, and to missions in Winnipeg, Canada, and in Japan. Just before the turn of the century the Sunday school children collected a token contribution which they sent abroad to aid children orphaned by the Turkish massacres in Armenia. Much later, during the First World War, the alliance supplied over nine thousand items, from bandages and bed ticks to sheets and slings, to the American Fund for French Relief. Following the war it sent a token gift to the Hungarian Relief Fund, another to the European Relief Fund, and a substantial gift to the Friends' Service Committee.

In addition to these benevolences the Woman's Alliance was responsible for the establishment, in 1889, of Rochester's Post Office Mission to distribute religious literature through the mails. It enjoyed an immediate success. By 1891 advertisements were being placed in several newspapers, including the *Rural Home* and the *Democrat and Chronicle*; a budget which had originally been only two or three dollars amounted, by February 1891, to \$256.25; and the number of people responding ran as high as fifty per month. In addition to using the mails, the alliance broadened the mission work in 1892, voting to establish a permanent circulating library of liberal religious books. Thus the mission grew, and in 1918 the Alliance Minutes reported that

Mrs. Wile of P. O. Mission gave a detailed account of her special work of advertising in *Current Opinion*, and the *New Republic*. In response 200 letters, have been written and received, from territory between Boston, to California, Texas, Quebec [sic] and Manitoba, one from Glasgow Scotland censored, a distribution of 300 tracts in the rack at the Erie R.R. Station.

More directly related to the social role of the church in the community were the Cortland Street parties which the Woman's Alliance sponsored for at least ten years. Well acquainted with the principle of the institutional church, Gannett had not long been in Rochester when he chided his parishioners for their civic unawareness. Observing pointedly that their church was located in one of the less desirable sections of the city, he charged them with having made little or no active attempt to know or to help the people in the immediate vicinity. "Have we not used this corner too much as our Sunday Club-House, feeling no responsibility whatever for its week-day betterment? That is not being a *Church*. Let us this next year try to be more a *Church*—a church *right here* [.]"⁴

The challenge thus thrown out, and repeated a year later, did not go unnoticed. In 1894 the Woman's Alliance began to hold regular Friday afternoon social gatherings for the women of Cortland Street. The first meeting was encouraging: "13 guests & 4 children," Mary Gannett recorded in her diary, "3 hostesses . . . , a fairly good beginning —will try again."⁵ And try again the women did. For the next ten years the Cortland Street parties were a regular feature of the church's community service. Sometimes there was nothing more than social camaraderie; frequently there were special lectures or musicales; occasionally there was an outing at the lake. But whatever the particular program, the Cortland Street parties undoubtedly did much to fulfill Gannett's desire that the neighborhood be brought into the church circle.

The Gannetts, however, were not only interested in the spiritual and social welfare of their parishioners and of the community. They also fostered its intellectual development and cultural broadening. In October 1889, therefore, Mary Gannett proposed to the Woman's Alliance that a meeting be called to organize a Unity Club, which would provide cultural and intellectual, as well as social and artistic stimulation, not only for church members, but for interested non-members too.

Twenty years earlier Gannett had organized a small reading club in his Milwaukee parish which, if it was not highly developed, yet provided a cultural outlet for his people. Later, in St. Paul, he formed a real Unity Club, whose activities were as varied as they were interesting. Organized "to gather up the 'loose brightness' of the society, as the preacher said,"⁶ the club included a glee club, an art class, as well as the usual reading and discussion groups.

In the Rochester parish, however, the Unity Club reached its peak. During the nineteen years that Gannett was closely connected with its fortunes, the literary branch, known variously as the Emerson Club and the Browning Club, studied the works of George Eliot, Lowell, Browning, Emerson, Carlyle, Plato, Montaigne, Goethe, Dickens, Kingsley, Hawthorne, Thackeray, Tennyson, Dante, Wordsworth, and Shelley. In 1906 a special group organized to study the religious faiths of the New England poets, Emerson, Bryant, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, and Whittier. There, indeed, was a study program calculated to educate anyone who had the courage and stamina to face the hard work which Gannett, as leader, demanded of its membership.

The Unity Club did not, however, contribute only to the cultural and artistic education of its members. It undertook, also, a most ambitious program of social education. The Social Topics Class, a division of the Unity Club, was organized, not as an action group, but as a discussion group. During the years of its greatest activity it investigated most of the major social problems of the day, local, regional, and national. Typical of the topics studied were city government, tax reform, public school problems, race problems in the South, Coxeyism, labor strikes, and Populism, bimetallism, marriage and divorce, trusts, and co-education and university extension. The class frequently used specific texts as its guide; and its lists included William Dean Howell's *Traveller from Altruria*, William Morris' *News from Nowhere*, the social writings of John Ruskin, James Bryce's *American Commonwealth*, and Woodrow Wilson's *The State*.

That this study was not done in a complete vacuum, and that its ideas, enthusiasms, and conclusions reached beyond the club limits, are apparent. The club had a reserve book shelf in the Reynolds Library, which the general public frequently and extensively used; and Emma Sweet, the class secretary, reported that

a prominent business man, well-informed on all the questions of the day, said to me a few weeks ago that the Social Topics Class under Mr. Gannett's guidance was doing more for the City of Rochester than she would probably ever realize; that its influence was not confined to the class, but felt throughout the city, and would bear good fruit in the future.⁷

For its members the Unity Club had thus been an important intellectual arena and a major social influence. "We knew it was well with

us there," wrote Abram Lipsky, one of the young members of the club.

We knew that that was the authentic hour, the authentic place for us, that we were not in an accidental room, on an obscure street, in an unfamed corner of the world, but that we were at the center, thinking and feeling the noblest that had ever been thought or felt in the world.⁸

* * *

Of all the church activities in which the Gannetts engaged, however, probably none was so close to their hearts as the Boys' Evening Home. When they moved to Rochester in 1889, the chaos and confusion, the get and grab of the Gilded Age were being seriously questioned. In the Protestant church, particularly, those earlier attitudes of self-righteous conceit and social irresponsibility attributed to New York's Trinity Church were retreating before new attitudes of church brotherhood and social welfare. By the turn of the century the philosophic movement of the churches uptown was reversing itself. Gannett had observed the trend carefully and he approved it heartily. The institutional church, he wrote, defining the new departure, is

a *Working Church*, or rather, a ch'h that works to better *this* life for people instead of merely the other life. It means a seven-day instead of a one-day church; a church therefore with Kindergartens & gymnasiums, & a working-people's club-room & Boys' Evening Homes, & so on. It means the Church becoming a neighborhood Guild, and a sort of active rival of the saloon and dime-museum. It even means a street-cleaning Church,—a church *doing duty as a citizen of this world.* . . .⁹

The Rochester Boys' Evening Home was the institutional church at its best.

Evening homes and newsboys' homes were not new on the American scene; and Gannett, early in his own career, had extensive experience in similar welfare work. In Boston in the early 1870's he had been instrumental in establishing a summer vacation Country Week for city children, working girls, and mothers; and, while pastor in Hinsdale, he took part in a similar Fresh Air Home, previously organized by the Unitarian parish. Then, almost as soon as he moved to Rochester, Gannett proposed establishing a Boys' Evening Home.

In October 1889 the Woman's Alliance discussed using the chapel simply for a boys' reading room. But from then on things happened quickly. On December 17 an organizational meeting was held; and

on January 7, 1890, the Boys' Evening Home opened. Within a month some sixty boys had paid their ten-cent monthly dues, had joined the Evening Home, and were meeting twice a week in the church. During the first few months little was done except to get acquainted with the boys, provide them with papers, magazines, and games, and serve them hot chocolate and cookies. Even this early, however, the home provided real service—at least half a hundred boys were kept off the streets two evenings a week and were given wholesome companionship and recreation. If, three months later, the church calendar reported that "we have not yet learned how to do more than entertain," that at least was a good start; and the announcement of January 8, 1890, was the better measure of good work. "The Com [mittee] for the Evening Home report great success—53 Boys present. There is a good deal of enthusiasm manifested."

Within three months the enrollment of the home had increased to ninety-five and a waiting list had developed. The better the workers got to know the boys the more sanguine they became of the worth of their undertaking. "We begin to know our boys," Gannett wrote in his annual report,

and they to know us, and we like the work better at the end of three months than of one. The fact that several of them have this last month been sentenced to the State Industrial School shows that we have a class that need our friendship, and that we have yet to find out ways to help them best

If the helpers sometimes wondered just what they were accomplishing by rounding up these nondescript youngsters, one thing seemed certainly clear to Gannett. "Our Street Boys' Evening Home," he wrote, "has been the main new enterprise in the Church, and certainly it has done us well-off folk good to touch the street-boy life,—whatever it may have done to them."¹⁰ Essentially, however, Gannett knew that it was helping the boys.

The need for more workers and for more funds was soon evident. By the end of 1890 the Woman's Alliance reported that "arrangements were made for additional supplies of helpers for the Boys Evening Home, for Nov. and Dec." Then, two years later, the Home itself undertook a series of five evenings of money-raising entertainment. The programs chosen bespoke both the serious and the recreational nature of the institution: a three act farce entitled "Fluctuations," two

stereopticon lectures (one on Rome and one on Coal), readings from Dickens, and a humorous musicale. The musicale at least was interesting enough to rate mention in the daily paper. The *Democrat and Chronicle* recorded numbers by the children's orchestra, a song sung by Mattie Pope (with the aid of mechanical accessories), a violin solo, and a dentaphone solo.

By 1893 the Home, now three years old, began a considerable expansion of the program. A small workshop was added to the equipment, and courses in manual arts were organized. In addition, the physical plant was improved by adding more tables, blackboards, and chairs; by excavating the cellar; and by adding new furnace flues and gas pipes. New classes in drawing and clay modelling were introduced, a paid superintendent was engaged, and a Sunday evening reading room opened. The success of the year's work was demonstrated the following spring at an exhibit of the boys' original work. Some of the carving and modelling, the *Democrat and Chronicle* reported, suggest "the professional rather than the novice."¹¹

It was not long before the home's success led to a plea for even more equipment. The boys needed lavatories, sinks, and showers so that they could clean up adequately; they needed at least two quiet classrooms for their studying; and they needed, most of all, a separate building.

Despite short supplies, however, the work continued to expand. Boys so inclined could, by 1896, study, in addition to subjects already available, spelling, penmanship, history, zoology, and physiology. Then, in 1897, geography, writing, literature, and natural history were added to the curriculum; and, a year later, birds, current events, arithmetic, language, journalism, and political economy.

Of the various projects carried on at the home, perhaps the most interesting was the "Boys' Evening Home Journal," an eight-page newspaper written and typed by the boys. Under the leadership of Abram Lipsky, a teacher in the public school system, the "Journal" joined the Good Government crusade and waged its own campaign against penny slot machines. In the candy stores on Chatham Street, the paper pointed out, there were "penny-in-the-slot" machines, carefully marked "Out of Order," "Broken," "for sale,"—just to fool the policemen. But any smart boy knew, the exposé continued, that the machines worked, and that into their interiors went the boys' pennies.

Obviously, the "Journal" observed, these machines were fixed: they couldn't be broken, but they could break the boys. Since boys naturally became fascinated with these machines and thus with gambling, the paper advised boys to "stop going to these foul dens, or at least to keep your younger brothers away."¹² The crusade was eloquent testimony to the home's good work.

By the time the Boys' Evening Home was ten years old, a campaign was launched to raise \$20,000 for a new building. The building, however, had to wait another twelve years. But finally, in 1910, two years after Gannett's retirement and just seven months after Brick Church had opened its new youth center, a \$23,000 addition to the old parish house was dedicated, named Gannett House to honor the guiding spirit of the church's social work during the past twenty years. Two days later, the new quarters for the Boys' Evening Home were given their own special dedication, complete with congratulatory messages from the Rochester Board of Education, Temple B'rith Kodesh, the Universalist Church, the city's various evangelical churches, and the Brotherhood of the Kingdom. With those dedications, Gannett's dream of a living institutional church and his cherished project, the Boys' Evening Home, reached their greatest fulfillment.

The story of the Boys' Evening Home is quickly told, for its purpose and its activities changed little from year to year. Its importance and influence, however, are less readily assessed. But, that the boys themselves appreciated the home seemed evident within two years of its opening. The *Post Express*, in a December 1891 article, observed that the boys were already proprietary toward the home, congregating around it at all times and affectionately scrawling their names upon its doors. Later the paper remarked that "philanthropic work in this city has rarely if ever taken a more practical direction than that to which the ladies and gentlemen who are conducting the Boys' Evening Home have devoted their labors."¹³ The home was, in fact, as one of its own graduates commented some sixty years later, "on a small scale . . . like the Hull House in Chicago and the Henry Street Settlement in New York City."¹⁴

The boys of the home were a motley lot. They came largely from the Polish Jewish and Russian Jewish families of the lower economic groups; and many of them were the children of immigrants. Many of them were bootblacks or newsboys. "Almost without exception," observed the Unitarian Church Yearbook,

they come to us dirty, often ragged, and with but little education; but one thing is decidedly in their favor, and that is, that rubbing against the world of their street-life, sharpens their wits, and, if they can be made to see the value of an education, success is assured."

The influence of the Boys' Evening Home was not limited to the boys themselves. Frequently the boys went out to bring back their brothers and their friends; and even some of their sisters, when they were older, offered their services at the home as teachers and helpers.¹⁶ Parents, too, were influenced, not only through their own sons, but also through members of the staff, with whom they frequently formed lasting and deep friendships. The motto of the Boys' Evening Home, "Educate through contact, not through conflict," suggested such a permeating influence; for that contact was in fact the heart and core of the educational and rehabilitative work.¹⁷

Gannett's own role was not unsung among the boys. "I think of Dr. Gannett, in my earlier years," wrote Meyer Jacobstein retrospectively, "not as a teacher or group leader but rather as a Guiding Spirit of the entire group of volunteers who carried on the actual work among the boys."¹⁸ And, as it appeared to Benjamin Goldstein, the personal contact which the boys had with Gannett in the home was for them a source of real and genuine inspiration.¹⁹

The lives of a few of the more outstanding youngsters illustrate the abiding influence which the home had. Alexander Jacobowitz became a printer and brought to his trade much of the artistic and creative talent which he had early developed in the art classes on Temple Street. At least four of the youngsters later became rabbis of the Jewish faith;²⁰ and one of those, Samuel Goldenson, attributed his choice of profession to the influence not only of his own Rabbi, Max Landsberg, but also of Gannett himself.²¹ Another Evening Home boy, Benjamin Goldstein, became later in life the executive secretary of Temple B'rith Kodesh in Rochester. Of all the home's graduates, perhaps Meyer Jacobstein was destined to become the best known. Jacobstein became a professor of economics at the University of Rochester and a leader in Rochester labor relations work. Later he served as a member of the House of Representatives in Washington. These were, no doubt, exceptional cases. But it is noteworthy that more than half a century later each of them looking back recalled the important role which the home played in shaping his career.²²

The good which the Boys' Evening Home accomplished was fortunately recognized by Rochesterians during its own best years. It has, wrote the *Post Express* in 1903,

for the last twelve years been the means of keeping hundreds of young street boys from the temptations with which they are surrounded at home, and helped make strong, upright men out of them. . . . [It had been responsible, the paper continued, for] molding ambitious, honest and skilful men out of these urchins, many of whom, were it not for the institution, might be living a life of miserable squalor, without ambition or care for the future.

And, in 1910, as Gannett House neared completion, the *Evening Times* observed that the Boys' Evening Home was "one of the most significant philanthropic labors of the city."

Such praise must have pleased Gannett. He had presided at the founding, and had nurtured the development of an institution which, during its lifetime, had been a distinct asset to the Rochester community. Although, before he died, the Boys' Evening Home closed its doors, he knew that it had served the city well, and that the community at large was ever more effectively doing the job which it had begun. It was a proper change, and the change itself bespoke the validity of the original project. But of all the tributes which Gannett or the home received, none probably pleased him so much as that which Meyer Jacobstein himself wrote in 1920.

It was neither a missionary nor an "uplift" society. It was just a sincere desire on the part of one group in society to share with others some of the spiritually good things in life. Some of us craved more of Mr. Gannett and we attended his Sunday services regularly for years. We have been called Jew-natarians. We prefer to be known as Gannettarians.²²

* * *

Although both Gannets had keen civic consciences, in active community service Mary Gannett was the dominant member of the Gannett team. Almost as soon as the Gannets came to Rochester Mary Gannett set about organizing the Woman's Ethical Club. Reminiscing about the old days, Hester Hopkins Adams wrote that "Mrs. Gannett was . . . the good genius of the Ethical Club, and it was her energy and persistence which gave us our start."²³ From the first regular meeting, in December 1889, the Ethical Club grew constantly until by the middle of the 1890's it attracted between two or three hundred to a thousand women to its meetings.

The purpose of the Ethical Club was "the discussion of questions in ethics and philanthropy of practical interest to women, and the cultivation of a spirit of liberality and co-operation among members of the various churches."²⁴ Its scope, however, was somewhat broader than its constitution suggested. On representative programs appeared such topics as the ethics of business relations, co-education in colleges, standards of living, organized charity, the double standard of morality, civic art, and the evolution of nursing. In addition to discussing these broad and inclusive social topics, the club actively participated in good causes, supporting, for example, the revitalization of the Rochester school system at the turn of the century, and working for the introduction of co-education into the University of Rochester.

Mary Gannett was also active in the affairs of the Women's Political Club, renamed, in 1891, the Political Equality Club. Having joined the club in 1890, she continued active in it for over twenty years, and during this period she held various offices. Unlike the Woman's Ethical Club, which was essentially a discussion group, the Political Equality Club was an action organization dedicated "to secure for women the unrestricted exercise of all the rights of citizenship, and equal constitutional rights with men, and equal protection of the law"; a purpose only slightly modified in 1912 to secure "equality of rights for all citizens, irrespective of sex, along civic, industrial and political lines."²⁵

In the same year that Mrs. Gannett joined the P.E.C. it federated with the National Woman Suffrage Association and continued active and vocal in the suffrage battle until, in 1916, it adopted a new constitution and emerged as the Woman Suffrage Party of Monroe County, to carry on the old battle to eventual victory in 1917. The club engaged in a variety of activities, all directed, in one way or another, toward increasing the freedom of women. In 1890 it was agitating for co-education at the University of Rochester and petitioning for the addition of a woman to the city board of physicians. It petitioned three years later for the removal of the word "male" from the state Constitution and distributed "thousands of sheafs of suffrage literature" in Rochester. During the winter of 1903-4 the club sponsored a series of ten lectures by such well-known figures as Caroline Bartlett Crane, liberal clergymwoman and self-styled city sanitary investigator; Samuel ("Golden Rule") Jones, mayor of Toledo and progressive urban

reformer; and A. E. Winship, editor of the *Journal of Education*. Earlier, in 1891, the club condemned State Senator Robinson's proposed bill to lower the age of consent from sixteen to twelve, as an "insult to every woman in the State."

Perhaps as a result of the YMCA Report on Social Conditions in Rochester (1904) the Political Equality Club, together with other women's organizations, called a mass meeting on March 23, 1905, to protest against vice and immorality flourishing in Rochester. Mary Gannett played a particularly active part in that meeting as chairman of the resolutions committee, which commended the Mayor for his efforts to abolish vice, offered the services of Rochester's women in that campaign, requested judges to impose the severest penalties for vice and immorality in the city, and commended the Rochester press for its interest in and good publicity for the anti-vice crusade.

A third organization for social betterment to which Mary Gannett belonged and in whose counsels she was active was the Women's Educational and Industrial Union. She, in fact, presided at the organizational meeting on April 10, 1893, and from that time on served on various committees, was for a time chairman of the Legal Protection Committee, and in 1911 became president of the organization. The purpose of the W.E.I.U. was to "increase fellowship among women, in order to promote the best practical methods for securing their educational, industrial, and social advancement."²⁶ It fulfilled its functions largely through committees on industries and employments, on legal protection, and on education.

Although the W.E.I.U. undertook numerous civic enterprises, Mary Gannett's principal interest appears to have been the legal protection committee, whose meetings she regularly attended, and in whose individual cases she frequently and zealously interested herself. She had presaged this type of work, in fact, as early as 1890, when, in a talk to the Woman's Ethical Club she discussed the programs of different working girls clubs, and explained how protection agencies defended women against dishonest employers.

* * *

The ramifications of the struggle for women's rights offer some of the most interesting and exciting episodes in the Gannetts' Rochester activity. As early as 1869, six years before he first met Mary Lewis, Gannett had taken an active part in a woman suffrage convention in

Milwaukee. Not only had he been elected a vice president of the newly organized Wisconsin Woman's Suffrage Association, but, more importantly, he had met three of the nation's leading suffrage leaders: Mary Livermore, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony.

After he was married and had moved to Rochester, however, Gannett remained largely in the background. Mary Gannett became the real crusader of the family. It was she who was most on the hustings. But between the two of them, Mary in the foreground, William in the background, they kept the Gannett family actively participant in the women's rights movement.

The battle for better schools in Rochester was inextricably involved with the battle for women's rights. The early 1890's found the city's school system in abysmal condition. The buildings were over-crowded, poorly heated, and badly in need of repair. Teachers' salaries were distressingly low. And perhaps worst of all, the school board, elected by the ward system, seemed calculated to provide a maximum of politics and a minimum of education. The situation was further compounded by the strong Republican machine of George W. Aldridge, who, from 1890 until 1922, reigned virtually supreme as Republican city boss, although from 1895 until about 1905 a Good Government Club fought that machine. It was through this maze of conflicting and overlapping interests that school reform threaded its way.

Under constant public pressure and despite its earlier reluctance to act, the state legislature, in 1898, finally passed the Dow Law. The unwieldy, twenty-member, ward-elected school board was reduced to five members elected by the city at large; and the legislature gave its open approval to the proposition that women were eligible to serve on school boards. With this encouragement from the state legislature, and with the hesitant support of Aldridge, who hoped to woo back disident Republicans, Rochester energetically undertook school reforms.

That same fall Mary Gannett took to the stump. Speaking, on October 11, before the Democratic city convention as representative of the Local Council of Women and the W.E.I.U., she strongly supported Mrs. Montgomery for School Commissioner. The choice was an excellent one, for Helen Montgomery, along with Mary Gannett, Jean G. Greenleaf, and the Anthony sisters, became one of the outstanding women progressive leaders in Rochester. The campaign proved successful, as Mary Gannett recorded in her dairy: "Rep. ticket elected!—Mrs. Montgomery is on the new school board!!!"²⁷

Thus the campaign for better schools, launched some years earlier, had succeeded. But, like most other issues, it was destined to be recurrent. In 1901 the W.E.I.U. again sent representatives to the Democrats and Republicans urging their support of incumbent commissioners George Carroll, Albert Townson, and Helen Montgomery. The Democrats, however, refused support, presumably because the candidates, though Good Government people, were mostly Republicans. That refusal very likely stirred Mary Gannett to further action, for twelve days later, on October 22, she presided at a woman's mass meeting to demand the re-election of the incumbents. "We're in a whirlpool of politics just at present," wrote Gannett, "to keep a reforming school-board in position ag't attack, and May is one of those at the front. . . . I am a very quiet member compared with her."²⁸ Yet Gannett did add the weight of his name to the statement of thirty-two independent citizens supporting the policies of the Board of Education and urging its re-election. "For public schools," he added later, "to get into party politics is the descent into hell."²⁹

The campaign for school reform generated much local interest, and the reformers won the support of a number of Rochester's leading citizens. It was an exciting experience, thought Gannett:

We are having the greatest campaign here to save our Schools from the grip of Democratic politicians,—after having done much to lift them from the slough through two years of a Reform School Board. . . . Part of the woe is that one of the leaders of the Bad Thing is one of *our* lawyers & a Ch'h Trustee, a man of high character,—in whom it is hard to understand this procedure. On the other hand, for comfort, another of our Democrat lawyers has bravely led the fight *against* his own party.³⁰

But goodness triumphed over the "Bad Thing," and on November 5, 1901, the reform school board was re-elected despite stiff opposition. The Rochester *Herald* regarded this victory "as a striking demonstration of the gratitude of the people of Rochester." The measure of that gratitude was suggested by the resolution which the Political Equality Club adopted in 1905, after the reformed school board had proved itself:

Resolved, That the Political Equality Club values highly the work of our present school board. We gratefully recognize that the present high reputation of our schools through the state, the great improvement in educational methods, the admirable housing of the school children, the better remuneration of the teachers, are

all due to them,—to their personal faithfulness and their economical management of the school funds. . . .

* * *

Perhaps the most satisfying for the Gannetts of all the women's rights crusades was that for the admission of women to the University of Rochester. As early as November 1889 the Women's Political Club had decided to send a committee "to visit the faculty of the Rochester University and ascertain why women are not admitted." President David Jayne Hill replied by informing them that "it is not in the power of the Pres. or faculty to admit women into this institution," and suggested that the club contact Dr. Edward Bright of New York, the president of the Board of Trustees. But the response from Bright was scarcely more encouraging than that from Hill, for all Bright said was that he would bring the matter before the trustees' meeting the following June.²¹

The women, however, did not let the matter rest. They decided to drum up public interest by publishing periodic articles in the daily papers "in favor of the admission of women to Rochester University"; and they appointed a committee to consult with university authorities to find out how much money would be required to make co-education possible. The Woman's Ethical Club seconded these actions by resolving "that the [W.E.C.] officers sign a petition requesting the trustees of the University to open it to women."

Vigorous action continued. At a reception for Elizabeth Cady Stanton in October 1891 President Hill strongly supported the principle of co-education and was seconded by Professor Samuel A. Lattimore. It fell to Dr. Edward Mott Moore to try to defend the university's hesitancy. He pointed out that the alumni were presumably against co-education and that the university would need at least \$200,000 to provide the necessary additional equipment. The women, however, were determined. In February 1892 the Ethical Club further resolved that the sentiment of their meetings was "that Rochester girls should not be obliged to leave home to obtain a college education"; and they appointed a committee including Mrs. William Eastwood, Mrs. A. M. Mosscrop, Mrs. Simon Stern, Mrs. Max Landsberg, and Mrs. William Gannett to investigate "Means of Raising Funds for College education for Girls. . . ."

The co-education crusade had now reached the fund-raising stage. During a public meeting in March 1892 at the Chamber of Commerce, William Gannett predicted that co-education would come to Rochester within ten years, and Susan Anthony issued a general plea for financial aid from Rochester businessmen. When Dr. Moore again interposed the university's poverty as a negative argument, Miss Anthony "promised to raise the money for co-education if Dr. Moore would grant co-education when it was raised."³² Then, four days later, the Ethical Club went into action, inaugurating a system of pledges to raise the money for what they hoped would be university co-education the next fall.

Six years passed, however before any really tangible developments occurred. In June 1898 the university trustees agreed to admit women if the friends of co-education would raise \$100,000 to help defray the expenses involved. A women's committee was immediately organized, which included both Helen Montgomery and Susan B. Anthony. Although not a member of the committee, Mary Gannett spent much time during the next two years interviewing influential Rochesterians; presiding at various co-educational meetings; and helping, in February 1900, to organize a door-to-door canvas of the city. By June 12, 1900, the committee had raised \$40,000. With this sum in hand the University trustees relented, lowering the guarantee figure from \$100,000 to \$50,000. The goal, therefore, was in sight.

Yet on September 3, three days before the deadline for fall registration at the university, the fund still lacked \$8,000. Considerable opposition to the project had developed among the university trustees, and some of the women seemed ready to abandon the whole effort. Gannett, however, felt that a determined effort might still save the day.³³

Three days later, on the deadline date, the situation appeared even more grim. Except for Mrs. Bigelow and Miss Anthony, all of the women's committee were out of town. When Mrs. Bigelow met with Gannett in Sibley Place the previous evening, she reported that Aunt Susan, as Miss Anthony was affectionately known, had somehow raised \$2,000 and was personally ready to guarantee the other \$6,000 if necessary. By this time Gannett himself was discouraged; nevertheless, he staunchly supported Aunt Susan.³⁴

Aunt Susan, already in her eighty-first year, worked like a Trojan.

She had hastened off to Mrs. Willis, commandeering the first \$2,000 from her with the quip, "You'll be happier for it as long as you live." She then got \$2,000 from her sister, Mary. "It was in her Will & Susan said, 'Give it now: You don't spend all your interest anyway,' & Mary yielded." She was now half-way to the goal. The \$500 which Mary Gannett had collected for the Susan B. Anthony scholarship fund (but had not yet reported) was added in. And, to help the final push, Gannett offered first \$500 in his own name and then \$500 in Mary's name.³⁵

The fund still lacked \$2,500. So Susan took a carriage and hurried off to Samuel Wilder's club. There she unceremoniously button-holed him, and, though failing to get any more money from him, came away with permission to use his name for her own guarantee.

Triumphantly Aunt Susan hastened to meet the trustees. But they balked again, this time pointing out to her that Mr. Wilder was a sick man and that, under the circumstances, a formal guarantee for the \$2,500 would be necessary. If the trustees, by this tactic, thought they had outwitted Aunt Susan, they were sorely disillusioned. As Gannett reported it, Aunt Susan faced them squarely. "Well, gentlemen, I may as well own up:" was the gist of her answer. "I am the guarantor, & I asked Mr. Wilder to lend me his name, that the cause needn't be hurt by 'Woman's Suffrage': my Life Insurance will cover it."³⁶

A battle had been won, but not yet the war, for the University decided that a policy of coordinate education would be followed in many of the academic courses, that the women and men would have separate class organizations, and that they would not compete together for academic prizes.³⁷ It was to be another fifty-five years before co-ordinate education, satisfactory as it may have been in 1900, would be replaced by co-education in fact. But that in no way diminishes the importance of the victory of 1900, a victory for education and for the women as well.

The Gannetts were happy—for they knew that they had played a part in a great movement: Mary Gannett, in particular, had been a leading figure in the crusade and in the victory; she had been, as the *Democrat and Chronicle* recalled a dozen years later, next to Susan B. Anthony, "chiefly instrumental in securing the opening of the college doors to women."

* * *

There was an epilogue to the co-education story in which Mary Gannett played an even more important role. Early in 1906 Susan B. Anthony died; and, as a fitting tribute to her work and to her memory, a group of Rochester women, led by Helen Montgomery and Mary Gannett, decided to erect a Susan B. Anthony Memorial Building on the University campus.

The organizational meeting assembled on March 23, 1906, at the Chamber of Commerce, under the general auspices of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, of which Mrs. Montgomery was president. The union had already issued a public appeal, asserting that "in the death of Susan B. Anthony, there is presented to the women of Rochester, who have been blessed by the presence and friendship of this great woman, an opportunity to lead in the movement to establish a worthy memorial of her life and service, in this her home city."²⁸ The assembled women, therefore, organized the Susan B. Anthony Memorial Association. Mary Gannett became chairman of a committee to plan a course of action; and, five days later, when permanent officers of the new association were selected, she became its president.

Not only did the Memorial Association encompass the women's organizations of Rochester. It had a national membership, with an executive committee which included (primarily for prestige purposes) many of the principal names of the woman's suffrage movement. But, if the national committee was largely for effect, the raising of money still included all who would give, from whatever source. To that end Mary Gannett herself went, in February 1907, to the National Woman Suffrage Association convention in Chicago where she addressed the delegates and secured the unanimous adoption of a resolution pledging the wholehearted support of the National Woman Suffrage Association to the Rochester memorial plan.

During the next several years Mary Gannett kept busy, addressing women's groups throughout the state on behalf of the memorial. In June, 1906, for example, she spoke in Phelps and Syracuse; in November at Saratoga; and in November 1909 she addressed to the New York State Federation of Women's Clubs a strong plea for contributions. In addition, her committee also distributed at least one hundred fifty pledge books to interested persons scattered from Maine to California. In the 1908 Annual Report of the Association it was further noted

that outside organizations interested in the cause were, in many cases, raising contributions on their own initiative.

Thus the friends of suffrage and of Susan B. Anthony worked quietly but persistently for the next six years, accumulating, by 1911, a fund of over \$20,000. Then, in 1912, the university received a \$200,000 General Education Board grant, which it was to match by \$800,000. This, in effect, amounted to an increased endowment of \$1,000,000. With part of this new endowment President Rush Rhees wished to provide separate classroom facilities for the women students. In addition, he had consulted with Mary Gannett and assured her that the university would be willing to contribute \$20,000 from the co-education fund raised at the turn of the century to help create a \$50,000 fund to erect the Anthony Memorial Building as "a home for general student enterprises, the social life of the women students." Approximately \$8,000 was still required to complete the fund; and the Memorial Committee adopted Mrs. Bigelow's proposal that the committee "pledge ourselves to raise the needed balance."

Within the year the planning and the collecting reached fruition. On June 9 the Memorial Fund Committee transferred its funds to the university. Shortly thereafter ground was broken for the Anthony Memorial Building. An academic year later the building was ready for use; and in February 1915 President Rhees wrote to Mary Gannett that "the building is rendering very useful service."³⁹

* * *

That phrase of Rush Rhees', applied though it was only to the Anthony Memorial, might well have served as a fitting testament to the Gannetts' career in Rochester. For during the thirty-four years of their joint residence, they did nothing if not render "very useful service" to their church and to their community. From their rejuvenation of a sleepy and not very vital church society through the work of the Woman's Alliance and the Unity Club, from their institutional services through such projects as the Cortland Street gatherings and the Boys' Evening Home, to their varied service to the community at large through support of progressive city government, school board reformation, and co-education, the Gannetts fulfilled the essential role of socially responsible citizens and illustrated in the combining of religious and social theory the best that was the Social Gospel and a liberal Unitarianism.

If Mary Gannett, because of her greater activity and front-line participation in civic projects, became the better known of the two crusaders; yet the less conspicuous influence of William Gannett was possibly more permanent. To assess one against the other is idle speculation, for the two were essentially complementary in all their enterprises. What Samuel Goldenson wrote of William Gannett might as well have been written of them together.

I have always felt that there are two kinds of influence in the world. One moves by arithmetic progression and that is the influence that is exerted upon individuals singly through direct contact with them. The other moves by geometric progression and that is the influence that is mediated through the effects of one's teachings and of one's life upon men and women who hold key positions in the community. It is such kind of men and women who always came to hear Dr. Gannett and to take counsel with him.⁴⁰

- 1 William C. Gannett to Martha Clark, August 4, 1889, William Channing Gannett Collection, University of Rochester (hereafter cited WCG).
- 2 Draft Copy, William C. Gannett to the Milwaukee Parish, January 8, 1869, WCG.
- 3 William C. Gannett to Mary T. L. Gannett, September 23, 1888, Collection in the possession of Lewis S. Gannett, West Cornwall, Connecticut (hereafter cited LSG). William C. Gannett to Jenkin Lloyd Jones, September 16, 1889, WCG.
- 4 William C. Gannett, Annual Report, May 10, 1894, Unitarian Church Records, Rochester, New York (hereafter cited UC-RNY).
- 5 Mary T. L. Gannett, Diary (1894), November 30, WCG.
- 6 St. Paul and Minneapolis *Pioneer Press*, April 17, 1877.
- 7 Annual Report of the Social Topics Class, May 12, 1892, UC-RNY.
- 8 Abram Lipsky to Anna V. M. Jones, March 10, 1920, LSG.
- 9 William C. Gannett, Annual Report, May 10, 1894, UC-RNY.
- 10 William C. Gannett to Mary E. Rice, April 16, 1890, LSG.
- 11 Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, April 27, 1893.
- 12 For the summary of the anti-slot machine crusade see Rochester *Union and Advertiser*, February 10, 1898.
- 13 Rochester *Post Express*, December 6, 1893.
- 14 Meyer Jacobstein to author, January 21, 1955.
- 15 Personal interview of the author with Benjamin Goldstein, October 16, 1954.
- 16 Personal interview of the author with Benjamin Goldstein, October 16, 1954; Meyer Jacobstein to author, January 21, 1955. See also *Post Express*, January 10, 1903, for the motto.
- 17 Meyer Jacobstein to author, January 21, 1955.
- 18 Personal interview of the author with Benjamin Goldstein, October 16, 1954.
- 19 Meyer Jacobstein to author, January 21, 1955.
- 20 Samuel Goldenson to author, December 14, 1954.
- 21 Alexander Jacobowitz is not included in the retrospect, as he was not living in 1954-5.

- 22 Meyer Jacobstein, typescript tribute, "A Newsboy's Appreciation of the Social Service Work of Dr. W. C. Gannett," in LSG.
- 23 Hester Hopkins Adams to Mrs. [--?] Drake, April 3, 1903, in Woman's Ethical Club Records, Rochester Public Library, Rochester, New York (hereafter cited RPL-RNY).
- 24 Woman's Ethical Club, Constitution, Article II, in Handbook, 1891, RPL-RNY.
- 25 Rochester Political Equality Club, Constitution, Article II, in Annual Report, 1893-4; and Revised Constitution, Article II, separately printed, 1912, both in the Emma Sweet Papers, University of Rochester (hereafter cited EBS).
- 26 Women's Educational and Industrial Union, Constitution, Article II, in Minutes, 1893-6, RPL-RNY.
- 27 Mary T. L. Gannett, Diary (1899), November 7, WCG.
- 28 William C. Gannett to Frederick L. Hosmer, October 23, 1901, WCG.
- 29 Rochester *Herald*, October 23, 26, 1901.
- 30 William C. Gannett to Frederick L. Hosmer, November 2, 1901, WCG.
- 31 Transcript, Edward Bright to [Mary] Anthony, January 15, 1890, in Women's Political Club [Political Equality Club], Minutes, February 6, 1890, RPL-RNY.
- 32 *Union and Advertiser*, March 15, 1892.
- 33 William C. Gannett to Mary T. L. Gannett, September 5, 1900, LSG.
- 34 William C. Gannett to Mary T. L. Gannett, September 8, 1900, LSG. This letter was written at 1:15, A.M.
- 35 William S. Gannett to Mary T. L. Gannett, September 8, 1900, LSG, written later in the day.
- 36 William C. Gannett to Mary T. L. Gannett, September 8, 1900, LSG, the later letter.
- 37 *Democrat and Chronicle*, October 1, 1901.
- 38 *Post Express*, March 22, 1906.
- 39 Rush Rhees to Mary T. L. Gannett, February 23, 1915, EBS.
- 40 Samuel Goldenson to author, December 14, 1954.

